



“ON “AT THE MANAYUNK TRAIN STATION” BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM”

Three of the four major Free School guys were based in Center City Philadelphia. Jeremy was the only one based somewhere else— in Manayunk/Roxborough, a section of the city hinging on the Main Line and northern suburbs. Manayunk has a special glamour against both the suburbs and Center City— although the whole of the ‘hood consists of one thoroughfare (Main Street) and a dozen side streets running perpendicular to it. Main Street has posh boutiques, restaurants, bars, art galleries, and even a pool hall— all standard stuff, but torqued towards enchantment by how Main Street looks. New York has no parallel, nor does L.A.; Chicago has Wicker Park and North Milwaukee Avenue (the best, most precise analogue I’ve seen to Manayunk); D.C. has Adams Morgan; and London, Convent Gardens. Main Street, for a popular section of an American metropolis, is charming and quaint; none of the buildings which constitute the block are more than two or three stories high— and because Main Street does not sport many chain retail outlets, many of the facades and awnings are distinct and unique.

It would be an exaggeration to say that Manayunk has its own art scene— sort of. When I moved to Philly at precisely the turn of the century, Jeremy (the first of the three other foundation Free School guys I met; had, in fact, met in Manayunk in ’97 on a semester break from PSU) was trying to jump-start Manayunk on this level, with a crew of poets and artists around something called ‘d’ magazine. Jeremy had already set himself into a mold— he liked to create a scenario around him in which he got to “play papa” to a brood of adorable, borderline-twee young aesthetes, with tastes groomed and adjusted by him. This was one

reason PFS was never that satisfying for Jeremy— as a Cancer, he liked to stay sequestered in Manayunk/Roxborough, and we were in Center City— and Mike and I were running the show. When Jeremy attempted to “play papa” with us, we just ignored him; and, with me at the helm, PFS was never going to be twee. As soon as PFS ended, Jeremy jumped back into a context not unlike ‘d’ magazine.

Still, Jeremy had a magical Cancerian quality for me of embodying the quaintness of Manayunk’s charm and glamour. The magical vista Jeremy creates in “At the Manayunk Train Station” is a collusion of the sacred and the profane, to create a startling composition, whose verticals and horizontals do a majestic trick against the starkness of the blue sky. Jeremy’s flaneur streak meant that he had a scattershot approach to art and photography— he liked to leave things up to chance. He always carried around a digital camera with him, and whenever we’d drink in Manayunk, he’d snap and click away. I had my own quirky feelings about Manayunk— for some reason, it only “worked” for me during the spring and summer months, especially spring. Main Street Manayunk in May is one vision of heaven I have. Jeremy had an uncanny ability in Manayunk to blend into the scenery to such an absurd extent that he might as well have been one of the boutiques, after one of which I named one of my best songs— “Worn Yesterday.” “La Tazza,” where Jeremy set up shop on Cotton Street, was also one of the last places on the East Coast Jeff Buckley performed before he drowned in ’97. In Center City, it was never as good. Jeremy, also, was only at his best in Manayunk, where I saw him many times— I’m not sure Mike or Nick ever did.

The sadness of Manayunk, if its there, is that small places tend to engender small lives — and, if you aren’t willing to make an effort to expand, if you just submit passively, your life may contract into nothingness if you remain there. The shell which protects also confines. Yet Jeremy had his moments and his visions, and if I can make the good ones stick, I see no reason not to.

Adam Fieled, 2013